

Altruistic Nursing Professors

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Diana Guingrich

Thesis Advisor

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela R. Cox". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Angela" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Cox".

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the characteristics of altruism in nursing professors and why it is important for them to have such traits to recruit new nursing educators. The analysis of responses from nursing faculty at Ball State University shows that the faculty members take great pride in their work and draw upon many forms for their inspiration. The shortage of nursing educators and nursing professors is well documented; we need qualified, altruistic nursing professors to recruit new nurses to follow in their footsteps. Included in the survey were questions such as, "what is the faculty member's background, inspiration, and idea of altruism?" An analysis of the responses was done to put together a summary that shows the thoughts of altruistic nursing professors at Ball State. Characteristics of an altruistic nursing faculty member included kindness, compassion, being caring and interested in the students, encouraging, professional, and supportive.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Angela Cox for advising me through this process. Her gracious help has guided me from the very start when picking a topic clear to the final touches. I would not have been able to complete such a thorough and unique project had it not been for her help.

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Introduction

Merriam Webster defines altruism as, “unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others” (Altruism, Merriam-Webster, 2012). Even from the start, Florence Nightingale knew that nursing should not be solely based upon technical skills, but a well-rounded profession based in values; one of the main values being altruism. This study takes a closer look at the impact that altruism has had on the Ball State nursing faculty and ways that altruism is exemplified in their character.

Problem Statement

Many studies have examined altruism and nursing care but few have examined altruism as it relates to nursing faculty and their teaching role. The purpose of this study is to investigate the characteristics of altruism in nursing professors and why it is important for them to have such traits to recruit new nursing educators.

Problem Significance

The current shortage of nursing educators is directly impacting the number of nursing graduates from university and vocational programs alike. In 2010, nursing programs across America reported turning away 75,587 applicants. These were qualified applicants (Rosseter, R.J., 2012). The American Association of Colleges of Nursing surveyed nursing programs in 2011 regarding vacant faculty position. Findings showed 1,088 vacant positions in the 603 nursing programs surveyed. Programs also indicated that 104 more faculty positions were needed in addition to these vacancies to meet student demand (Rosseter, R.J., 2012). Identifying altruistic characteristics of nursing professors is pivotal to recruitment and retention of new nurse educators and faculty.

Purpose, Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the characteristics of altruism in nursing professors and why it is important for them to have such traits to recruit new nursing educators. The following table presents the survey questions used in this study.

1. How long have you been a nurse educator/faculty member and what inspired you to teach?
2. What steps did you take to get to this position and what would you have done differently in your journey to where you are now?
3. Is there a nursing instructor that stands out in your mind as being altruistic? How would you describe them, and how has this individual impacted you personally and as a teacher?
4. What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a nursing instructor, and how are you dealing with this challenge?
5. Along your journey through nursing school and getting to where you are today, what were some things that inspired you to continue on? What is one of the biggest inspirations that you have today?
6. Compassion fatigue is prevalent in nursing. What advice would you give to new nurses to help keep them inspired?
7. If you could give one piece of advice to a student interested in nursing education, what would it be?

Definition of terms

The following definitions are used in this study:

1. Nursing faculty: One who is employed at Ball State University in the School of Nursing.
2. Nurse educator: One who educates nurses and students on new nursing skills and best practices.

Assumptions and Limitations

A convenience sample of nursing faculty from Ball State University School of Nursing was used for this study. Limitations include a small sample size and the potential for participant bias due to the participants teaching in the same school of nursing that the researcher attends. The researcher will assume that the participants will be honest and forthcoming with their answers on the survey.

Summary

The nursing shortage is directly impacted by the shortage of nursing faculty. The purpose of this study is to investigate the characteristics of altruism in nursing professors and why it is important for them to have such traits to recruit new nursing educators. This study uses a survey format and a convenience sample of nursing faculty at Ball State University.

Review of Related Literature

According to Rhodes, Morris, and Lazenby, “The image of nursing is changing. Images of angels in starched skirts and nursing caps eagerly awaiting guidance from physicians has long since been replaced by images of competent, independent men and women of diverse backgrounds” (2011). This same study looked at motivations for selecting a certain profession and what the contributions of competence and caring are to nursing care. They found that “emerging themes for motivation reflected nursing values, especially altruism, and coincided with students' beliefs of self-efficacy and goal attainment” (Rhodes, Morris, & Lazenby, 2011). Responses of students for their study showed that they knew that competence was a major component of the nursing career, but also that altruism is a priority for nurses today.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2008) has identified caring as a foundational value for nursing. This supports the need for altruistic and caring nursing faculty members to recruit new faculty. In the study done by Rhodes, Morris, and Lazenby (2011), the most prevalent theme was altruism and the students identified themselves and others as caring. They also stated that “Several students specifically stated that they wished to help children or others ‘in need.’ Some addressed the vulnerability of individuals and their wish to contribute to society; others identified global health needs” (Rhodes, Morris, & Lazenby, 2011).

Altruism is one of the main reasons that nursing students wish to pursue a career in this field. Rhodes, Morris, and Lazenby also found that “over two-thirds expressed caring as an essential nursing characteristic...Many described caring as ‘essential,’ ‘the most important trait,’ ‘central to nursing,’ or ‘critical to the role’” (2011). This finding further supports the work of Cook, Gilmer, and Bess (2003), who also found that beginning nursing students mentioned their main reason for choosing a career in nursing was to help others.

Research continues to state that nurses were ‘more altruistic’ than the general female college population or medical students (Johnson, Haigh, & Yates-Bolton, 2007). This particular study found that “Student valuing of altruism and honesty has changed in important ways in the intervening decades. Nursing students are now generally less altruistic but value honesty with patients a great deal more than their counterparts in 1983” (Johnson, Haigh, & Yates-Bolton, 2007).

Another study by Pang, Senaratana, Kunaviktikul, Klunklin, and McElmurry (2009, p. 313) states that “nurses should be concerned about the benefit and well-being of others, even at some cost” They write that nurses must be good listeners and be attentive to the patients’ needs. This is something that an altruistic nurse must do and model to others. Pang, Wilawan, Wipada, Areewan and McElmurry, also stated that “nurses should share the tasks required for the advancement of the nursing profession” (2009, p. 314). This includes encouraging nurses to go back to school to become future nursing faculty members. Furthermore, the study stated that the nurse educator’s main responsibilities are to teach and research; they are responsible for the development of the nursing profession (Pang et al. 2009, p. 316).

Ann Smith analyzes altruism in her study as a concept of caring and brings up the idea that altruism could possibly be something socialization brings about (Smith, 1995, p. 786). Smith stated that Macaulay and Berkowitz defined altruism “as behavior carried out to benefit another without anticipation of rewards from external sources” (Smith, 1995, p. 786).

The study titled, “Reconstructing nursing altruism using biological evolutionary framework” done by Carol Haigh in 2010, goes against what Smith stated that “nursing is solely a manifestation of disinterested sacrifice for the benefit of others” (Smith, 1995, p. 786). It was interesting to view the differences between the two studies. Haigh states that altruism has always

been a “fundamental element of the decision to nurse” (Haigh, 2010, p. 1402). Haigh also found that data shows altruism is far from being a “disinterested exercise of compassion” and is rooted in the desire to consolidate a “power base for personal or group benefit” (Haigh, 2010, p. 1402).

Many studies have shown that altruism is a main reason that students enter the nursing field and continue through the profession. Many different viewpoints have been stated, yet all point to the characteristics of caring, kindness, and professionalism in the nursing field. The question that remains is what part does altruism play in the role of a nursing educator or faculty member?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The nursing faculty serves as role models for the students in a way that they can show the characteristics of altruism through their actions (Murray & Main, 2005). Role modeling is a way to teach by example; this is a way that the faculty at Ball State University School of Nursing teaches altruism.

Methodology

For this project, the faculty members were asked to complete a survey of seven questions inquiring about their nursing background and thoughts on altruistic nursing educators. The survey would take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. To be eligible to participate in this study, the participant must be above the age of 18, be able to read at the post-baccalaureate level, and be a faculty member of the Ball State Nursing Department.

Survey Monkey was used to distribute the survey and to review the anonymous responses. Participation in this study was completely voluntary and the faculty members were free to withhold information or withdraw their permission at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. They were encouraged to ask any questions of the investigator before the start of the survey and at any time during the study. While using Survey Monkey, limitations were set in order to inhibit the program from collecting the participant's IP address and e-mail address so the responses were truly anonymous.

Once the project is complete, survey data will be deleted along with the results page from the Survey Monkey account. The study will be kept under the researcher's password-protected computer that will be stored in a secure, locked location at all times. This thesis paper will be stored in the Honors College and publicized online via their thesis archive. Only members of the research team will have access to the data. There are no perceived risks for participating in this study; there are no perceived benefits for participating in this study.

Analysis of Data

Sample Characteristics

The sample consisted of nursing faculty at Ball State University. Years of employment as a nursing faculty member for this sample group ranged from three to thirty-two years.

How long have you been a nurse educator/faculty member and what inspired you to teach?

The survey began by obtaining a general history of the Ball State School of Nursing faculty. The experience of professors ranged from 3 to 32 years. The responses were varied such as, "I have been teaching for 10 years. I thought I could do better than preceptors I had." The inspiration of the faculty was varied as well with responses such as, "I was inspired to teach because we need great nurses in the future, I enjoy working with people and felt called to teach." Some faculty members wanted to nurture future students and make the program better, while others felt a calling to teach. One faculty member even stated, "I wanted to teach because I liked to explain information about nursing to nurses and to nursing students." From the responses, one can gather that the faculty at Ball State is teaching because they felt a personal calling to teach and nurture students.

What steps did you take to get to this position and what would you have done differently in your journey to get to where you are now?

The answers to this question varied, but were relatively the same as far as highest education level. Most went from a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) to a Master's of Science in Nursing (MSN) with an occasional Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN) and Doctorate of Nursing Philosophy. One area that was slightly different across the board was the

doctoral degrees. The difference stemmed from the desire to have a doctoral degree. Some stated they got their doctoral degrees and would not have done anything different while others responded something similar to, "I really have no desire to pursue a doctorate." One faculty member became a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) and stated that, "Part of the role of a CNS is to be an educator for patients, families, nurses, and other health care professionals." She continues on to state that once she was in this position for 10 years, she turned to becoming an academic educator or nurse faculty. She then realized that "in order to maintain and advance myself in both knowledge and research/evidence that I needed to obtain a doctorate degree."

Is there a nursing instructor that stands out in your mind as being altruistic? If so, how would you describe them, and how has this individual impacted you personally and as a teacher?

Answers varied because the faculty members came from many different backgrounds and did not all write a specific instructor's name. Some wrote about an instructor they had during school, and others wrote of mentors and fellow faculty members. The survey did not specifically ask for a name but some responses included them. One faculty member stated, "I had a fabulous mentor as a new nurse who literally took my ideas and helped me put them into action; how to care for a client and how to call the doctors, and how to advocate for the client."

One professor was referred to by stating she is, "caring, unselfish and concerned for the welfare of others. She is an inspiration for me personally and professionally." Another instructor was referred to by name as someone who was "very encouraging, kind and always seemed interested in what students were doing." These two particular nursing faculty members are still part of the faculty today at Ball State and are continually encouraging students every day in the same way that they have inspired past nursing students.

Another faculty member described her inspiration as a main advisor who worked “with me individually to be sure that I understood how to look at the big picture. She spent a lot of time with me more than I believe than other nurse faculty did.” She goes on to state that she tries to be that person for her students today “in order to help and facilitate them to be successful in completing their nursing degrees.” Altruistic professors put their personal time into the success of their students and will do anything to be encouraging. One faculty member stated, “They would have us over for dinner, listen to our concerns and give real advice on life and career.” Other altruistic instructors were described as “caring, unselfish and concerned for the welfare of others,” “very encouraging, kind and always seemed interested in what students were doing,” and “showed kindness and compassion in her dealings with staff, students and patients.” These professors truly cared for their students and wanted the best for them.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a nursing instructor, and how are you dealing with this challenge?

Nursing is a very rewarding career and can take you many places. Along each journey there are challenges; this question was asked to find out how the faculty deal with these and ways new nurses can learn to deal with them in the future. One faculty member stated that the “biggest challenges are the hurdles, and struggles of doing things a ‘certain’ way: not bucking the system or making too many waves.” She continued on to say, “I think it is attitude. You have to accept that there is only so much any one person can do... and that, perhaps, your slant on teaching and nursing can make a difference.”

Another challenge that arises for many faculty members is, “Trying to remember all of the students’ names with such large classes and making the educational process personal.” The

nursing faculty at Ball State has always been interested in getting to know the students personally, even when there are many different students. A different challenge arose when one faculty member stated, “Some students do not understand that there is a lot of effort required during nursing school. The struggle becomes how to be a positive influence but yet be very truthful. Nursing school is hard work!”

Another trend was that faculty members feel responsible and invested in everything the students do. This can be seen as a positive and negative especially when one is “constantly trying to come up with ideas to keep my students engaged and help them learn new material.” One other challenge that came up multiple times included students who only do the minimum amount of work or those that are not as interested in success in the nursing program. The faculty member stated it is hard to see faculty who have “high expectations for students, but do not help them to meet those expectations.” These students are the ones that need guidance the most and are in greater need of altruistic nursing professors. Many challenges come with being a nursing educator, but from the responses collected it is evident that faculty members believe the benefits greatly outweigh struggles.

Along your journey through nursing school and getting to where you are today, what were some things that inspired you to continue on? What is one of the biggest inspirations that you have today?

This question was included in the survey because nursing is an inspiring field and impacts lives every day; even nurses who have been in the field or teaching for a while are continually motivated. Answers to this question varied from family members to religion, with various outliers. One stated, “For me, I would have to say it was my father. He had many

physical obstacles in his life and never let them get in his way. He would talk about his life in the hospital as a child for 3 years and the nurses and the staff.” She continues on to say, “I just felt it made a difference and that then I could make a difference.” It is not rare to see family members express their appreciation for the nursing staff and this faculty member also stated that “During some of my most dire moments as a nurse and educator I had people randomly come up to me and tell me how I impacted them.”

Making a difference is one of the biggest ways that nurses leave impressions on the people they surround. Talking about the impact on people’s lives, one faculty member stated, “Nurses are the most respected professional in national surveys and have been for many years. I have received much appreciation or reward over the years from patients, families, nurses, and students for what I do and did as a bedside nurse, CNS, and nurse educator/faculty.” A great addition to that comment was that “I feel that I make a difference for students and impact healthcare and nursing with every student with whom I have taught. “ The faculty members influence nursing students to have an impact on others and leave a lasting legacy. Through their encouragement and support, they are able to see the evidence of their work when the nursing class graduates and uses the skills they were taught and eventually touch the lives of others.

This is a moment that all nursing students can relate to and one faculty member stated, “I love seeing the excitement of the brand new student when they have the "now I get it" look on their face. I believe this is where God has placed me for my ministry.” Another tie to religion comes in when they believe that God has pushed them in this direction to teach and is still an inspiration to this day. A more humorous response was, “I saw a lot of instructors ‘eating the young’ and I wanted to nurture the students. I always knew I wanted to come back and make an impact on the school of nursing. I hope I can do this.” She continues on to say, “What inspires

me is my students and patients. It reminds me of why I chose nursing and how much I love being a nurse.”

Compassion fatigue is prevalent in nursing. What advice would you give to new nurses to help keep them inspired?

The answers to this question were encouraging and well-thought out. These should be shared with every new and experienced nurse as a way to encourage quality care. One response was to “Try to stay focused on the moment at hand. Try to have some balance: don't live to work.” Many times life revolves around work and many responses had to do with leaving work at work. The faculty members were encouraging to “Take time to step away and enjoy your non-working life.” Another good piece of advice was to “Set realistic goals and maintain personal and family time.” Another piece of advice that came as a response to this question was to remember the real reason you wanted to become a nurse in the beginning. She stated that things change once you get out into the real working world and you need to continually remember what your personal inspiration was and what made you get here to begin with.

Going to a conference to get “re-charged” or rotate to another unit/ specialty are other pieces of advice to keep inspired. One of the best pieces of advice was to “Take care of your health and spiritual soul and remember where you started from.” All of these are great things to remember when starting out a career in nursing, or even after a few years have passed. One response to this question was particularly interesting. This faculty member stated that she had recently participated in compassion fatigue research and thinks that, “in order to reduce compassion fatigue, nurses must try to take care of themselves and give themselves breaks from the workplace including play time.” She goes on to state that, “I think that nurses need to

participate in debriefing sessions to talk about their feelings regarding a patient or care situation that impacted them negatively or so deeply that they may be obsessed with it.” These are both very valuable pieces of information that anyone in the nursing field should keep in mind and participate in.

If you could give one piece of advice to a student interested in nursing education, what would it be?

The answers to this question were very interesting and useful. Because there is a shortage of nurse educators, this is something that many others should hear about if they are interested in pursuing a career in nursing education. The faculty members were in agreement with this question with a majority of them saying something along the lines of, “Go for it! Teaching is hard work but the rewards are priceless.” Some advised to continue no matter how old you are. One additional response that was encouraging stated, “If you love teaching and are patient it is the most rewarding job! There is nothing better than training future nurses and seeing them get excited when they do something well.”

Other responses included encouraging words such as to, “Keep in mind your ultimate goal and be prepared to work really hard to achieve it.” Not everyone wants to work hard to get where they want to be. Things worth achieving are not always easy, so you should be willing to get help. This nursing faculty stated you should talk to a nursing instructor or two that you get along with well and ask what they enjoy most. She also suggested going to the National League of Nursing web site and access information about becoming a nurse educator.

Discussion

A nurse impacts people every day and in many ways. This project was put together to research and better understand the views of the Ball State School of Nursing faculty because they are the ones who have made countless students into the nurses they are today. This has provided many words of encouragement and advice that will be able to be passed down to future students. The faculty here at Ball State is genuinely interested in serving the students here and helping them become great nurses in the future. We need nurses who are not just able to do the skills needed to care for a patient, but who are also able to be kind, compassionate, and able to teach others.

Maybe some of the students who have gone through the Ball State Nursing program will return to follow in the footsteps of their faculty members and lead future students to do the same. If we do not have quality nursing faculty members then the rate of future educators will continue to drop, for students will not be interested in teaching. Nursing is more than a set of skills, and it is more than relationships with other nurses and doctors. It has to do with the way one treats his or her patients and the relationship that is formed.

Summary of Study

Some of these questions hit close to home because I am starting my career as a new nurse in May. I did this survey partly to inform fellow students what the nursing faculty has stated as their inspiration and what we should be looking forward to, but also to better understand what an altruistic nurse looks like. I wanted to look into things they were glad they did in their careers, and things they may have changed. This will help future students when planning a career path and also help other students that will read this and want to take their career in the same direction.

Research has shown that altruism is a major part of nursing and a major draw to the career. I wanted to take a look at what the nursing faculty at Ball State University thinks about altruism and their experiences with it. I received many different responses and gathered them all to represent Ball State Nursing as a whole. Giving of oneself for the betterment of others has been a part of nursing since the beginning with Florence Nightingale and it will continue to be. The future generations need to recognize this and continue to strive for this.

As nursing students leave Ball State and travel into their new careers, altruism can show up less and less. Nurses can get so busy and caught up in helping others, that they stop helping themselves. They need to remember to take care of themselves first so they can always be in good shape to care for their patients. This was a response that was very prevalent in this study. Many of the faculty members stated they would tell new nurses and nurse educators would be to focus on one's self.

The tips and responses about compassion fatigue is also a great piece to take away from this study because it is prevalent in all hospitals and healthcare settings. It is a major issue and can be avoided if confronted correctly. By reviewing what needs to be done to prevent

compassion fatigue, new nurses can be better employees and improve the areas that they will work on.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Compassion fatigue is prevalent in nursing. What advice would you give to new nurses to help keep them inspired?

I recommend that this topic be further researched. There are many studies about this topic, but not to the extent that it could be. This is something that impacts nurses everywhere and in every area. It impacts nursing education recruitment of new nurses. Nurses will be less willing to go back to school to become a nursing faculty member if they are fatigued in their field. We can also draw on the advice given from the faculty such as continuing education no matter what age you are, and taking time for yourself. The impact of compassion fatigue on the decision to become a nursing faculty member should be explored further.

Finally, since many studies have examined altruism and nursing care, but few have examined altruism as it relates to nursing faculty and their teaching role, more studies need to be done. The purpose of this study is to investigate the characteristics of altruism in nursing professors and why it is important for them to have such traits to recruit new nursing educators. Future researchers should take this information and carry it on to another study that will further look into how altruistic nursing faculty can help decrease the nursing shortage.

Recommendations

For future studies, I would use a larger sample size to widen the responses. The faculty members that responded may have been biased toward certain career paths or even had different ideas of altruism. Although open ended questions work well for this type of study, some of the questions could have been more clear and concise or broken into two or more questions allowing the researcher to better analyze the responses. The information gleaned in this study relates to

those of Ann Smith (1995, p. 785) and show that altruism is a selfless act of caring for others and can be seen through personal examples of the nursing faculty here at Ball State University.

Final Summary

The nursing shortage is directly impacted by the shortage of nursing faculty. This study investigated the characteristics of altruism in nursing professors and why it is important for them to have such traits to recruit new nursing educators. After an analysis of the responses, characteristics of an altruistic nursing faculty member included kindness, compassion, being caring and interested in the students, encouraging, professional, and supportive. It is important for them to have such traits to recruit new nursing educators and further the careers of students. The analysis of responses from nursing faculty at Ball State University shows that the faculty members take great pride in their work and draw upon many forms for their inspiration. Altruistic nursing professors impact more than statistics; they change lives.

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Appendix A: Permission to Conduct Research



Institutional Review Board

DATE: April 1, 2012

TO: Diana Guingrich

FROM: Ball State University IRB

RE: IRB protocol # 301760-1

TITLE: Altruistic Nursing Professors

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: April 1, 2012

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on April 1, 2012 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Editorial notes:

1. Approved- Exempt

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact please contact John Mulcahy at (765) 285-5106 or jmulcahy@bsu.edu if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (<http://www.bsu.edu/irb>) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

Reminder: Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.